LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF OREGON

The League of Women Voters of Oregon, established in 1920, is a grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

March 19, 2025

To: Representative Ben Bowman, Chair, and Members of the

House Committee on Rules

Re: **HB 3166-2** – Unified Primary advancing top two candidates – **COMMENTS**

The proposed amended bill, HB 3166-2, requires a unified primary ballot for partisan and nonpartisan offices regardless of political party affiliation, while advancing the top two vote getters to the general election ballot. There are parts of this bill that the League of Women Voters of Oregon supports.

LWVOR has a position on open primaries (referred to as "unified" primaries in the bill). Whether through party primary elections or a unified ballot of individual candidates on which all voters could cast their votes, the "**LWVOR supports more open primary elections."**

Unlike previous bills for open primaries, or established primary systems from other states, we appreciate that HB 3166 has specific protections for both minor and major parties. This includes safeguards against candidates hijacking party labels on the ballot to imply party acceptance.

After several long-term studies on election systems (2008, 2017, 2023), the LWVOR has continued to reject the idea that a top-two election system offers adequate representation to voters. Systems advancing two or even three candidates to a winner-take-all ballot for the general election encourage vote splitting, manipulation and strategic voting during the primary. Washington state and California both have top-two systems that have frequently resulted in general election races in which one of the major parties is not on the ballot. Whether due to one of the major parties having a clear population advantage or where vote splitting has produced a general ballot with two candidates from only one party (sometimes even the minority party), it **reduces the choice for voters**. Considering voter registrations, Oregon could see many districts with only Democrats proceeding to the general ballot (for the major parties), and some districts (although fewer) with only Republicans. The original HB 3166 bill advanced five candidates with a change in the ballot counting system to best provide representation and serve voters.

LWVOR looks forward to the day when we have an improved election system protecting all political parties and open to all voters. A unified primary (one ballot with all candidates for all voters) is part of our goal, based on our positions. We appreciate that HB 3166 is promoting that part of our goal – a unified primary.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this legislation.

Barbara Klein
Acting President, LWVOR

Norman Turrill
LWVOR Governance Coordinator

1330 12th St. SE, Suite 200 • Salem, OR 97302 • 503-581-5722 • lwvor@lwvor.org • www.lwvor.org